

Limbaugh Message Trumps Obama Style

Like most Americans, I have been challenged recently to make sense of a great number of speeches given by politicians, political appointees, and media pundits. We are in an era in which many of our community leaders desire to rewrite or redefine history, while selling us philosophies and theories instead of proven solutions to our pressing problems. As an English major and a student of public speaking, I have been shocked by how poorly our greatest leaders have used the opportunities they have had to speak to the nation.

This week there were two important speeches that were distinct opposites. The first was President Obama's economic speech last Tuesday and the second was Rush Limbaugh's speech last Saturday at the Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC). These two speeches seemed to be polar opposites. The President should get an A+ on style, but a C- on substance. While Rush Limbaugh followed a brash politically incorrect approach to his speech, it should be graded a C- on style but an A+ on substance.

The president's financial message finally struck a nerve with average Americans listening from their living rooms. It seemed to me that "President Barack was Back!" As he addressed the Congress and Senate, he showed his ability to move an audience, showcase outstanding Americans, and seemingly speak from his heart to the issues of the day.

After the speech, the polls showed that it was a hit in terms of style, force, and building confidence. Anthony Salvanto, who directs surveys for CBS, spoke about the president's address: "Before the speech, 71 percent said they were optimistic about the next four years with Barack Obama as president, and that went up to 80 percent after they tuned

into the speech.” Unfortunately for the nation, business leaders and the financial markets did not grade the president on style; they looked for content and fiscal responsibility that could be “sold” to business leaders around the world. In the absence of an encouraging fiscal blueprint from the president and his economic advisors, the stock market and business leaders continued to make plans to weather the biggest recession the nation has seen in over 60 years.

Economists are waiting to hear the figures as to how many jobs we have lost in February. An official report will be posted by Friday but many researchers feel as though the Obama speech was too little, too late. In the minds of leading economists, his positive remarks about the economy were focused on the wrong audience. Managers, who undoubtedly wanted to delay layoffs, received nothing of substance upon which to hang their hats. Leading economists, like those who write for Barclays Capital, say that next week’s job report is “likely to be the weakest to date.” They expect payroll losses of 675,000 and an unemployment rate of 8 percent. Global Insight’s Bethune and Gault are predicting payroll losses of 750,000 and an employment rate of 8 percent – making “February ... the worst month yet.”

Stephen Stanley, chief economist for RBS Greenwich Capital had a slightly less, dire view he assumes a jobs loss of *only* 625,000. Yet his prediction is based only on gut feelings. In fact he writes, “Our sense, admittedly based mostly on anecdotes, is that labor market conditions remain dismal but are not necessarily accelerating to the downside.”

Where does all of this leave the president, his speech writers, and the American people?

It seems that the savviest of our business community still feel as though there is an anti-business tone in the president’s public addresses. They believe that the trillions of dollars of expenditures planned in the stimulus package

will probably take a long time to bring positive change. In the meantime, businesses and business owners will be blamed for our problems.

Moving on to Rush Limbaugh, I had the privilege of reading his speech in its entirety and watching most of its salient clips. Naturally, there were many excerpts taken out of context and played on what Rush would call “the drive by” media. Rush is not my favorite broadcaster. Even though, I am a conservative, I prefer to listen to the Fox News team instead of Mr. Limbaugh. Although he frequently resorts to meaningless name-calling and endless stereotyping of liberals, his speech’s content should be graded as an A+. But he seemed to purposely leave himself open to criticism from his detractors because of the style of his presentation. Despite his polarizing comments about hoping President Obama fails, he made it clear by the end of the speech that he was opposed to the new president’s stimulus package for many clear reasons including the following three:

1. unnecessary growth in government,
2. disincentives for small businesses,
3. the ratcheting up of “class warfare” rhetoric.

In addition to these points, Limbaugh talked about what bi-partisanship should mean to conservatives and how they should wage a war of principled public awareness. I felt personally encouraged by Limbaugh’s speech. I will keep on presenting my conservative views with boldness during these trying times, because there is a war for the soul of the nation, which continues to rage.

In conclusion, while the president’s speech won style points last week, Rush’s speech won points on substance. After Rush’s inspiring words, I believe more than ever before that America has a bright future, which will be built by the hard work and ingenuity of great Americans from every ethnic group, financial background, and social class.

